

CHALLENGE



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Bosses' police reform is a joke

SHUT THIS RACIST SYSTEM DOWN!



Workers put killer capitalism on trial for Valentina Orellana Peralta and Daniel Elena Lopez.

LOS ANGELES, CA January 8 – In response to the brutal murders of Valentina Orellana Peralta and Daniel Elena Lopez by the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), Progressive Labor Party (PLP) members and friends attended a march to protest this racist capitalist system. The march began outside the clothing store where LAPD opened fire

on innocent workers and murdered Daniel and Valentina on December 23 after Daniel was in the midst of a mental health crisis and hit a customer with a bike lock. The LAPD KKKop, William Dorsey Jones, fatally shot Daniel and then Valentina who was shopping for a quinceanera dress. The protest culminated in front of the LAPD North Hollywood

station. Party members sought to bring to light that killer cop Jones, a Black cop who championed the fallacy of “good policing” is the ultimate symbol of liberal Big Fascist (see Glossary, page 6) reforms.

This case is a stark reminder of the futility of “reforming” the police in a capitalist system where the ruling class holds power at the point of a gun. Only with a communist revolution will the working class be able to truly live our lives free of terror and violence.

A revolutionary party

Since its founding in 1965, PLP has boldly championed the fight against racist police terror and murder. We have been actively involved in countless campaigns for justice with the families of the victims of this terror, who are disproportionately Black, Latin, indigenous and immigrant workers. We have repeatedly pointed out the role of the police in a capitalist society — they serve the bosses and protect their property, money and power in the face of potential rebellion by the working class. We have said that nothing less than a violent overthrow of this racist, murderous system and the establishment of a communist, antiracist workers' dictatorship can destroy the bosses' armed forces and end capitalism's reign of terror.

The march was organized by several reformist and nationalist groups. The organizers handed out signs and buttons with pictures of Valentina, but none with Daniel's picture, playing into the mainstream media's criminalization of a worker in need. The march took the street and continued for several miles. The chanting was loud and continuous. About 60 people participated in the march and rally, 23 of whom took copies of CHALLENGE. The speakers at the rally mouthed the need for “revolution,” but did not explain that the police cannot be reformed because their job is to keep the ruling class in power.

Copying the racist liberal media and politicians,

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JOIN THE INTERNATIONAL FIGHT FOR COMMUNIST REVOLUTION

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OUR FIGHT

- ★Progressive Labor Party (PLP) fights to destroy capitalism and the dictatorship of the capitalist class. We organize workers, soldiers and youth into a revolutionary movement for communism.
- ★The dictatorship of the working class — communism—can provide a lasting solution to the disaster that is today’s world for billions of people. This cannot be done through electoral politics, but requires a revolutionary movement and a mass Red Army led by PLP.
- ★Worldwide capitalism, in its relentless drive for profit, inevitably leads to war, fascism, poverty, disease, starvation and environmental destruction. The capitalist class, through its state power — governments, armies, police, schools and culture — maintains a dictatorship over the world’s workers. The capitalist dictatorship supports, and is supported by, the anti-working-class ideologies of racism, sexism, nationalism, individualism and religion.
- ★While the bosses and their mouthpieces claim “communism is dead,” capitalism is the real failure for billions worldwide. Capitalism returned to Russia and China because socialism retained many aspects of the profit system, like wages and privileges. Russia and China did not establish communism.
- ★Communism means working collectively to build a worker-run society. We will abolish work for wages, money and profits. While capitalism needs unemployment, communism needs everyone to contribute and share in society’s benefits and burdens.
- ★Communism means abolishing racism and the concept of “race.” Capitalism uses racism to super-exploit Black, Latin, Asian and indigenous workers, and to divide the entire working class.
- ★Communism means abolishing the special oppression of women— sexism—and divisive gender roles created by the class society.
- ★Communism means abolishing nations and nationalism. One international working class, one world, one Party.
- ★Communism means that the minds of millions of workers must become free from religion’s false promises, unscientific thinking and poisonous ideology. Communism will triumph when the masses of workers can use the science of dialectical materialism to understand, analyze and change the world to meet their needs and aspirations.
- ★Communism means the Party leads every aspect of society. For this to work, millions of workers — eventually everyone — must become communist organizers. Join Us!

CONTACT US

Email
desafio.challenge@gmail.com

Mail
Box 808 GPO, Brooklyn, NY 11202

Internet
www.plp.org

Twitter, Facebook, Instagram:
@PLPchallenge

WHO WRITES FOR CHALLENGE?

CHALLENGE is for the working class, produced by the working class. The fact that CHALLENGE/PLP articles are not signed grows from PLP’s criticism of the cult of the individual in the former socialist Soviet Union and China. We do not want to encourage the possibility of building up a “following” around any particular individual.

While an article may be written by one person, the final version is based on collective discussion and criticism. Many times this collective discussion even precedes an individual’s writing of an article.

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Editorial

Burn Down Capitalism!

On January 9, racist killer capitalism struck again—this time in the Bronx, when it murdered 17 working-class immigrants from Gambia, including eight children. After a faulty space heater ignited, the fire ripped through the Twin Parks North West building. Thick, black smoke enveloped the staircases and killed whole families as they tried to escape. Their deaths were the direct result of racism and the capitalists’ callous obsession with profits. In the 1970s, to save money, developers built this 19-story tower—and countless other buildings for low-income workers—without fire escapes or sprinkler systems. Though New York City later tightened its rules to require these basic safety measures, a loophole left “older” buildings exempt—even though buildings constructed in wealthier areas in the same period included these safety features (NPR, Up First, 1/10).

This racist inequality reflects the stranglehold that landlords and real estate interests hold over the local bosses. The Bronx fire was more than a tragedy. It was an inevitable repercussion of this racist, profit-driven system, where murderous landlord negligence is the norm. Liar Eric Adams, New York’s new liberal Black mayor, disgustingly blamed the victims for not closing the apartment door behind them as they fled for their lives. He neglected to mention that these doors should have been self-closing and were a violation of the city’s building codes. Like so many other buildings that house the working class, Twin Parks North West has a long history of management neglect, unaddressed code violations, and resident complaints over a lack of heat and ventilation.

Capitalism’s law of maximum profit makes it impossible to protect the international working class from burning buildings, crumbling housing, skyrocketing rents, or homelessness. In response to this tragedy, workers have responded with working-class solidarity. A GoFundMe account has raised over a million dollars. Workers have collected supplies for those left homeless and given emotional support to victims’ families. These efforts should give us confidence in the future—in a better world to come. A state run by and for the working class can guarantee safe and decent shelter for all workers, just as communists once did in the Soviet Union and China. Only communism—a society without money, exploitation, racism, and sexism—can put out the raging fire of this disastrous system.

Global housing and infrastructure crisis

Three days before the tragic inferno in the Bronx, an “accidental” fire wiped out three adult sisters and their nine children in a Philadelphia row house where four smoke detectors failed. Under capitalism, “accidents” are code for racism and the disproportionate killing of Black workers.

The legacy of early zoning laws across the country that promoted segregation exists today in housing instability that forces Black people into neglected rental units rife with maintenance issues that place them at higher risk for everything from fire deaths to lead poisoning. Black workers are more likely than people of other races to die in accidents like fires. Though Black people make up about 13 percent of the U.S. population, they represent 25 percent of individuals killed in residential fires across the country, according to the New York State Department of Health (CNBC, 1/13).

The everyday atrocity of workers forced to live in death traps extends far beyond U.S. borders:

- “About 1.6 billion people live in substandard housing and 100 million are homeless, according to United Nations’ statistics” (Forbes, 5/21/21).
- Last October, a fire tore through a 13-story building in Kaohsiung, Taiwan’s main port, killing at least 46 people and injuring dozens more. According to the city’s fire chief, “the majority of residents were elderly; the stairwells were full of debris; and the building materials did not meet fire safety standards” (cnn.com, 10/14/21).

- In 2018, the Grenfell Towers in London ignited, killing 72 mostly immigrant workers because profit-driven owners used cheaper, highly combustible materials to refurbish the building.

Meanwhile, international corporations and private equity firms are amassing obscene wealth by the minute as they create the conditions for worldwide home prices and rents to soar. “In 2015, corporations purchased \$1 trillion in real estate in the world’s top 100 global cities...” (Bloomberg, April 2018). As these real estate profiteers build a glut of luxury housing, much of which sits empty, rents for basic apartments skyrocket. Millions of workers are jammed into unsafe living conditions. In this nightmare system, substandard housing—much of it lacking electricity, running water, or basic sanitation—is the norm worldwide. War and poverty displace millions more, forcing our brothers and sisters into dilapidated shantytowns.

The real fire starter is capitalism, a system spiraling into fascist decay as the bosses put their short-term profits above workers’ lives. The rulers use their capitalist state to blame the victims and to win the working class to accept mass slaughter. There’s no way to reform this rotten system—we need to burn it down!

Decay of capitalism and growing fascism

In recent weeks, the liberal finance capital wing of the U.S. ruling class has tried to divert our attention to last year’s January 6 siege of the U.S. Capitol, an insurrection organized by Donald Trump and his gutter racist supporters. But it is the liberal racist bosses and their stooges—from Joe Biden on down—who pose the greatest danger to the working class.

Eric Adams’ predecessor, the fake leftist Mayor Bill de Blasio, created a sham affordable housing plan (Reuters, 1/29/21), paving the way for developers like Rick Gropper and his Camber Property Group to leverage generous tax breaks and purchase thousands of Section 8 buildings, including Twin Parks North West (Yahoo News, 1/13; The Guardian, 1/14). Not long before the fatal fire, Adams invited Gropper to join his transition team for housing issues (NYT, 1/9).

When government officials and the media openly justify mass death in service of capitalist profit, it is a sign that fascism is around the corner. As capitalist interests gain tighter control of the state, Black liberal fascists like Adams will continue to toe the line. Ultimately, as they move toward inter-imperialist war to defend their profits and the failing U.S. empire, the rulers are planning the deaths of millions of more workers. That genocide will be anything but an accident.

Communism is the only solution

During the Covid-19 pandemic, we have seen workers intensify the fight for decent housing. They have bravely resisted eviction, exposed predatory landlords, and taken over vacant buildings. Through these struggles, workers are learning the important lesson that the capitalist rulers can never meet the needs of our class. Under capitalism, affordable housing for all is an impossibility—even though it’s the working class that builds all the housing. When the bosses and their profits call the shots, whether it’s for housing or food production or public health, workers lose out every time. Only by fighting for communism can we smash the profit motive and build a world to meet worker’s needs. Under communism, workers will collectively own all resources and our own productive capacity.

We can look to past revolutionary societies for a glimpse of what is possible. After the Chinese Communist Revolution, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, tenants in the countryside forced landlords to stand trial. The oppressors’ land was confiscated and redistributed to workers in need. Unfortunately, these gains were reversed with the emergence of capitalism in China. Our brightest hope is to rebuild a revolutionary communist movement led by Progressive Labor Party. Join us!☛

Student walk-out demands safety 'We've got to tear this system down'



Students take to the streets to demand safer schools, take a lesson in communism

CHICAGO, January 14 – Hundreds of multi-racial, working-class youth took over the streets downtown to challenge a racist capitalist education system in crisis. Students across the U.S. staged walkouts from their campuses and students from across the city converged for a militant and spirited rally in front of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) headquarters.

This inspiring action was organized as negotiations between the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), the racist education bosses of CPS and Big Fascist Mayor Lori Lightfoot fell apart. Working-class youth took this militant action upon themselves, as the city bosses and union hacks have done nothing to stop Covid-19 infections and deaths.

Communists from the international Progressive Labor Party (PLP) proudly supported these bold youth in their fight. But the profit system offers no future for our youth other than unemployment, exploitation, or imperialist war. PLP offers the only real route out of this capitalist nightmare: that of an international communist revolution. Under communism, the initiative, creativity, and leadership

of youth will help steer society forward, instead of being trivialized. The working-class youth that took the streets today are future generals in the Red Army that will bury capitalism forever!

Antiracist youth lead the future

As soon as we learned that CPS students were planning a walkout, enthusiasm grew among our local collective. In contrast to the closed door negotiations between CPS and CTU, this direct action represented a more militant and grassroots protest against racist education conditions.

We organized to support two high schools on the city's south side where the Party has a presence. As the walkout started, the young people were met by PLP members distributing CHALLENGE, holding signs, and joining in on pro-student chants like, "When I say, 'Youth voice,' you say, 'Youth voice matters!'" and "Get up, get down – We've got to tear this system down!" Many eagerly took copies of CHALLENGE.

The energy increased as students from many schools joined forces at the CPS headquarters. The

front entrances were blocked, as the youth gave speeches and led more chants. Black and Latin students – those most viciously attacked under this racist capitalist system – delivered some of the most passionate speeches and militant leadership.

The protest closed with a short march to shut down traffic on nearby State Street. Despite a heavy presence of the kkkops, the young fighters were able to safely marshal the march in order to prevent any confrontations or arrests. Many students hung around to talk about communism and the Party with us, gave contact information, and even shared the link for our 1/17 forum on Revolutionary Violence on social media!

Liberal capitalists remain the principal danger

The working-class students leading this movement are demanding more social distancing measures, more testing, masks and therapy, as well as laptops for those in remote learning (Block Club Chicago, 1/14). But under the capitalist profit system even the most simple health and safety measures for workers are routinely denied. Under a communist society run by the working-class, basic health and safety measures will be routinely provided.

This social murder is being committed under the watchful eye of the dominant liberal capitalist bosses, particularly the racist Black misleader Lightfoot, who has been relentless in pushing working-class youth and education workers back into unsafe schools (see page 3). She's following the lead of the Big Fascist wing (see Glossary, page 6) of the U.S. capitalist class. These Wall Street finance capitalists are currently fronted by Joe Biden. They are eager to return to their "normal" profiteering ways, while millions of workers get infected and thousands get sick and die.

And now these Big Fascists are promoting the idea that an ongoing pandemic will be normal for the foreseeable future. They want us to accept our deaths, and the deaths of our class brothers and sisters, as normal, as they live on and profit. As domestic Small Fascist rivals threaten them from within and imperialists in Russia and China threaten them abroad, they are desperate to control the youth they know will be needed to fight and die in their future wars for profit.

Class struggle is in session!

Workers and students must not accept this fate. Let's keep this youth-led anti-racist fightback alive and connect it to our collective need to build the mass international PLP and a new communist world. Class struggle is in session! Join PLP!✊

For Valentina, Daniel, and too many names Smash racist LAPD

Continued from page 1

who believe that police terror is justified, the speakers said not one word about the murder of Daniel Elena Lopez.

Rulers' phony solutions for racist murder

Politicians and other reformist mouthpieces for the bosses' lies have proposed various "solutions" to the problem of racist police terror and murder over the years. Here are some of them, and how these recent murders again prove that reforms can never benefit the working class:

More Black, Latin and women cops. Jones, the killer cop who murdered both Daniel and Valentina, is Black.

Better training, including "de-escalation." One month before the murders, Jones and all of his fellow LAPD thugs were given training instructing them to "consider their surroundings when firing their guns" "to minimize the risk of hitting innocent bystanders." As was reported in the January 19, 2022 issue of CHALLENGE, the LAPD first claimed a 911 call identified Daniel as having a gun. But, as soon as they arrived, the cops were told by a store

employee that Daniel had no gun. There were zero attempts by the cops to "de-escalate" the situation. Killer KKKop Jones ran into the store and just kept running until he saw Daniel and immediately opened fire with his rifle (LA Daily News, 1/11).

Community-oriented policing In the wake of the murder of George Floyd and many others, Jones created his own non-profit, called "Officers for Change." Its logo is a police cap with a red heart in the middle. Jones identified himself as a proud Black man who had been a "victim of racism." The nonprofit's mission is to win Black and Latin working-class children to view the police in a positive light (Orange County Reg, 12/30/21).

Elect district attorneys who promise to prosecute killer cops. Recently elected "progressive" LA County District Attorney George Gascon is still "investigating" whether Jones will be charged or not. Of the over 600 murders of workers by killer cops in LA County between 2012 and when he was elected in 2020, Gascon has stated that he will reopen the investigation of exactly four of them. None of the cops have yet been prosecuted by Gascon's office.

But, the reality is that the murder machine goes on and on and on. Valentina Orellana Peralta and

Daniel Elena Lopez are but its latest victims in Los Angeles.

Smash racist KKKops

The worldwide 2020 mass uprisings of tens of millions against racist police terror taught us that mass antiracist anger can temporarily force the capitalists to take actions to make it appear that their "justice" system can benefit the working class. But despite that bold upsurge, the capitalist-controlled media and other institutions are now promoting the need for more cops. Los Angeles is just one example of this trend. The liberal racist LA City Council voted for a 3 percent increase in LAPD funding in 2021-22 and the LA Police Commission is proposing a further 12 percent increase for 2022-23 (LA Daily News, 11/23/21). More blood money for cops means more racist terror. In 2021, the LAPD killed almost as many workers as in 2019 and 2020 combined (LA Times, 12/27/21).

There is no justice or peace for workers under capitalism. Only a communist revolution and the elimination of racism from the face of the earth will ever bring the justice and peace that the world's workers deserve. PLP is committed to lead that fight.✊

Big Fascist Eric Adams deadly for Black workers

Only weeks into the New York City (NYC) mayoral administration of Eric Adams, capitalism has revealed once again that Black politicians are on the front lines of fascist police terror and deadly living conditions for workers in NYC and around the world. Police raids of Black youth in Brooklyn on January 4 followed by a massive fire killing at least 17 workers in the Bronx on January 9 prove the point.

In Progressive Labor Party (PLP) we know that especially under the cover of a Black mayor, much like President Barack Obama as former president, our class must be more courageous than ever at our jobs and in our neighborhoods in calling out the atrocities committed by those with the same skin color and from the same “communities” that we come from.

Eric Adams is no different. The capitalist warmongers running the Democratic Party need politicians like Adams in NYC and Ras Baraka in Newark, New Jersey, to play leading roles in keeping Black workers disciplined and submissive to the needs of an ever-more-volatile capitalist system.

Politically-backed slumlords to blame for Bronx blaze

In the aftermath of the January 9 fire at Twin Parks North West Tower, Eric Adams invoked the age-old blame-the-victim mantra of “personal responsibility,” accomplishing exactly what the flailing main imperialist wing of the U.S. ruling class needs right now.

Adams blamed the deaths of children as young as four or five not on his firetrap landlord buddy Rick Gropper (NY Mag, 1/13, cityandstateny.com 1/12) but on Black immigrant workers themselves running for their lives and neglecting to shut doors that would have closed on their own if Gropper had properly maintained them. A tenant interviewed after the blaze put it best:

They're sending up just enough heat to say they're sending up heat, but it's not enough to keep you warm, and if you don't use a space heater, then you use your oven (NYPost, 1/10).

This is capitalism in a nutshell: the landlord's disregard for safety protocols led to needless death— what Freidrich Engels called “social murder.”

Police raids terrorize Black youth

Days before the deadly Bronx fire, on January 4, the Adams gang set the stage for this new wave of social murder forced onto workers by increasing the tempo and intensity of New York Police Department (NYPD) raids targeting Black and Latin youth. Plainclothes ‘anti-crime’ units that murdered Shantel Davis, Kimani Gray and Saheed Vassell in Brooklyn have been reinstated by his administration (NYT, 1/5).

The bosses were forced to disband these units during the anti-racist protests following the death of George Floyd, but they quickly restored their brutal policies of shoot to kill once the protests subsided. Only communism can accomplish the goal that all workers seeking justice are fighting for: a world without any racist cops empowered to defend capitalist inequality.

Raids, like the one on January 4 where 17 Black youth were arrested by the cops, rely on weak “guilt-by-association” conspiracy laws that use social media and cyberspace collaborations with law enforcement to round up workers by the hundreds. The newly appointed Black female NYPD Commissioner Keechant Sewell gives us a sense of the Big Fascist (see glossary, page 6) direction that the desperate ruling-class is headed in: “There will be more cases like this one, not just here in Brooklyn but in every borough” (Brooklyn DA/YouTube, January 10).

Sewell received high-grade training in counter-terrorism with the FBI Academy in Quantico, VA, so she is savvy enough to acknowledge the “lack of choice” Black youth face, but her actions speak louder than any words—for the youth aged 17-23 targeted in this raid (PIX 11, 1/4).

These Task Forces are responsible for a 20-year campaign of terror targeting Muslim communities with kidnap-style street arrests, summary deportation and targeted infiltration of community centers and houses of worship.

Whether it is Sewell's compatriots persecuting Muslim workers or former NYC Mayor Mike Bloomberg's over-decade-long “stop-and-frisk,” workers have suffered from racist political repression at the hands of NYC mayoral administrations.

In promising “more cases” Sewell is building on a high bar the NYPD set for fascist, repressive terror. Bloomberg's stop-and-frisk practices recovered a paltry number of weapons (The Atlantic, 7/24/13) but terrorized a generation of Black and Latin youth (NYT, 1/5). As with stop-and-frisk, the Big Fascists' aim to target gang members under the guise of Black conservative leadership is not safety; it is terror.

Angry youth must join PLP to fight racist policing

Long-term investigations prove that city governments are aware of exactly which young people are in deepest crisis. Educators have similar insight, yet schools remain sites of repression and neglect for uncounted thousands.

While the bosses forced youth into unsafe educational conditions during the pandemic, PLP supported student anger and protest in NYC and beyond (see page 3). Students at Brooklyn Tech high school (see letter, page 6) led the way for protests from Chicago to Boston with students standing up to capitalist failure in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. All we can expect from the bosses is a steady dose of aggressive policing in our schools modeled in the image of the Sewell/Adams regime.

Young people are in crisis, a crisis so deep that, for some, gangs appear to be their best option. But students don't need street gangs or the gang in blue; they need PLP!

Calls for more Black leaders for capitalism only feed the illusion that there is a version of capitalism that can work for us, and this has proven true from NYC to Newark to the working-class communities in the Caribbean and Africa where politicians meet angry youth with guns and state repression. “Community engagement” with the likes of Adams and Sewell is the kiss of death. Identity politics blinds us to this truth and hence is poisonous. The future of our youth is an afterthought for the ruling class Sewell and Adams front for.

Black youth, from Minneapolis to Baltimore to Ferguson and beyond, have led uprisings recently that rocked the world. The racist U.S. ruling-class tremble in fear at the potential explosive force which rests in the heart of their crumbling imperialist world order. Their great nightmare is our great hope. The leadership of Black workers and youth remain a key force for communist revolution.✊

MLA Radical Caucus

To end capitalist climate crisis, fight back & build PLP

DECEMBER 4—The Radical Caucus (RC) of the Modern Language Association (MLA) opened its mini-conference Keywords: Climate/Capital with a question: “How does understanding that capitalism is the key cause of the climate crisis help us address the immediate urgency of dealing with its effects?”

At the Dec. 4 meeting Progressive Labor Party (PLP) members argued that we urgently need a communist revolution as an answer to the impending climate crisis, not the dead-end reformism of the Green New Deal, which assumes that capitalism will and can continue only in some new green mode.

Most of our friends' presentations were urgent, informed, provocative—but reform-oriented. Then one speaker quoted from David Walker's 1829 abolitionist tract *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*, and a heated discussion began about violent resistance and direct action in climate struggles.

The crux of the debate being: Do we need revolutionary violence to end the global capitalist climate crisis?

Capitalism is the crisis

Someone pointed out that land defenders like the Wet'suwet'en in Canada were already the targets of state violence. Another decried the pacifism embraced by some climate organizers. There was a vigorous defense of non-violence as both tactic and philosophy from other speakers. But David Walker's fighting abolitionist spirit increasingly shaped the discussion. Even the speaker who had praised the Green New Deal was moved to say that maybe we did need “a radical edge.” PLP members argued that capitalism and its destruction of the environment and workers' lives could never be abolished peacefully or by elections, and that we need a communist party to organize a mass armed revolution.

Building a mass revolutionary party

For those of us in PLP who are longtime organizers in the Radical Caucus, a significant development this past year has been that a number of younger faculty and graduate students have joined and now work with the Party in the RC. This is important because many militant antiracist, an-

tisexist, and anti-capitalist faculty, workers, and students recognize the connection between the crisis of climate collapse, racist capitalist exploitation, and the pandemic.

But the reversals of the two major communist movements in the 20th century, in the Soviet Union and China, have made it difficult for even radical anti-capitalists to embrace communism and a communist party as anything other than utopian. They often hold their noses and vote for liberals because they see no alternative.

Our role as communists is to overcome this skepticism; share our analysis of the setbacks of past communist movements; explain why PLP views liberals as more dangerous than overt conservatives; and uphold revolutionary communism as the only realistic alternative if life on the planet is to survive and thrive.

We need to become more skilled at bringing class consciousness and building a communist movement to the fight against climate change. Our links to friends in the MLA Radical Caucus are a two-way street. We learn from them, they learn from us and our class will win through struggle and revolution.✊

Sidney Poitier, no hero for antiracist fightback



The slap heard around the world- Sidney Poitier and Larry Gates-did not land in the face of racist capitalism.

In the 1967 movie “In the Heat of the Night,” Virgil Tibbs, a Black detective played by Sidney Poitier, is slapped across the face by Endicott, a white plantation owner he is interrogating in a murder investigation. Tibbs immediately retaliates with a slap of his own—a gesture that has gone down in history as “the slap heard round the world” (Guardian, 1/7). Never before had the Hollywood screen allowed—let alone affirmed—such an expression of Black anti-racist anger. We want to cheer.

Yet, even this feel-good moment is directed by the ruling class. Working-class movie-goers need to be skeptical of the pleasures afforded by popular culture. We may think movies are “just entertainment,” but we are being strategically positioned to view some characters and actions as villainous, and others as admirable: nothing could be more political. So, how do movies reflect the historical pressures of their times? What ruling-class ideologies do they affirm? How do we apply communist criticism to the propaganda of the bosses—capitalist entertainment, after all, is part of the state apparatus.

Impossible stains status

The films of the recently-deceased Sidney Poitier (1927–2022) provide an excellent opportunity for communist critique. Poitier is best known for several films from the mid-1950s to the late 1960s in which he played characters transcending racial antagonism through near-impossible displays of individual integrity, stoicism, and moral generosity.

In “The Defiant Ones” (1958), he and Tony Curtis co-star as escaping prisoners chained together; at the end, Poitier’s character gives up the chance to hop onto a freight car to remain with his wounded friend. In “Lilies of the Field” (1963)—for which Poitier was the first Black man to win the Best Actor Oscar award—he plays an itinerant handyman who, free of charge, constructs a church for a group of German nuns. In these sentimental films, multi-racial solidarity is linked not with antiracist struggle, but self-sacrifice.

As James Baldwin caustically commented about the finale of “The Defiant Ones:” “Liberal white audiences applauded when Sidney, at the end of the film, jumped off the train in order not to abandon his white buddy. . . . The Harlem audience was outraged and yelled, Get back on the train you fool! “

(The Conversation, 1/7).

In 1967, three of Poitier’s films were top box office hits. In “To Sir, with Love,” Poitier plays a teacher who tames and edifies rebellious youth in a tough London neighborhood. “In the Heat of the Night” shows Virgil Tibbs not only slapping the plantation owner but also challenging the racist condescension of the Mississippi sheriff who calls him “boy.” “They call me Mister Tibbs,” is his famous response.

“Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner” features Poitier as a brilliant doctor who confronts—and triumphs over—the liberal racism of the parents of the young white woman he plans to marry. While the film challenged near-universal taboos on representing interracial relationships it aimed to portray Poitier as an impossibly perfect suitor, feeding into respectability politics.

Poitier furthers myth of individual success

In preceding decades, such heroic roles had not been available to Black actors. Poitier ostensibly broke the mold, clearing the way for Laurence Fishburne and Denzel Washington, Angela Bassett and Viola Davis. But Poitier’s aura of near-saintly “dignity” came at a price. The heroes he portrayed were “well-dressed,” “well-spoken,” and “self-controlled”; they never organized collective resistance to racism.

Indeed, they embodied the myth of individual success: Virgil Tibbs insists upon being called “Mister Tibbs.” Moreover, despite his matinee-idol good looks, Poitier was almost never cast as leading man in a romantic role; even his role in “Guess who’s Coming to Dinner” contains near-zero erotic charge.

Poitier’s films appealed to hesitant, white liberals by making it possible to identify with a Black man who did not require them to do anything more than admire him. (See Sharon Willis, *The Poitier Effect: Racial Melodrama and the Fantasies of Reconciliation*).

In his offscreen life, Poitier hardly conformed to the pacifist image he projected in his most popular films. He and his closest friend Harry Belafonte together risked their lives to bring desperately-needed funds to Mississippi after the 1963 lynchings of civil rights fighters (Dallas News, 1/22)). When racist

mobs gathered outside his Mississippi motel room while he was filming “In the Heat of the Night,” he slept with a gun under his pillow—and told the movie’s director, Norman Jewison, “I got a gun under my pillow and I’m going to blow away the first guy who comes through that door” (People, 1/22).

But Poitier insisted on only taking roles that would refute inherited stereotypes, even if this committed him to playing the same hero over and over. “I felt I was representing 15, 18 million people with every movie I made,” he once commented (NYT, 1/7).

Poitier and actors like him help legitimize U.S. capitalism

Many of Poitier’s obituaries noted that his career traced the arc of the Civil Rights Movement. What they failed to mention is the role he played in stifling the very antiracism to which his films gave expression. The U.S. ruling class was fearful of a working-class uprising, and especially of Black rebellion (see Robert F. Williams, *Negroes with Guns*). Ultimately, the typical Poitier hero supports the capitalist state; Virgil Tibbs is, after all, a cop, bent on restoring law and order. Like their predecessor, current actors like Angela Bassett also help workers buy into a more diverse face of capitalism.

Furthermore, Poitier’s films legitimized U.S. imperialism by shoring up the image of the United States in the eyes of the world. Starting in the mid-1950s, the U.S. was competing for the hearts and minds of the vast nonwhite populations rising up against colonialism and drawn toward the Soviet Union (See Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*).

There was a division in the ruling class: southern landowners wished to retain the highly profitable practice of Jim Crow, while more far-seeing imperialists wanted to sanitize the nation’s image by proposing that the nation was overcoming its racist past. The “slap heard round the world” was part of this ideological project.

In the final analysis, Sidney Poitier was no culture hero in the working-class struggle against racism. From this era, far more important—and for this reason maligned and harangued to the end of his life by the U.S. government—was the communist Paul Robeson (See CHALLENGE, 1/5). 🍌

LETTERS

We encourage all CHALLENGE readers to send in letters and articles about their experiences fighting the bosses worldwide.



Students choose fightback over attendance

Ever since the start of this school year, we all have been no strangers to low attendance rates, social distance protocols, and inconsistent schedules. Despite all shortcomings, everyone in the building pulled themselves through a strange year. Right before the winter break, everything was just like the last time schools went remote. The classrooms were practically empty and confirmed Covid-19 cases within the school were rising at an alarming rate. However, a few days after the New Year, we came back to a lack of change. Nothing to protect the school from the new variant.

I understand why the city, the school faculty, and even some students would prefer to remain in person. But we remain open despite it being detrimental to the health of everyone in the building. A majority of my classmates and teachers have fallen ill from the virus. Classes lack substitute teachers as the school is too understaffed to replace the ones who are in quarantine. The length of this pandemic compounded with the lack of agency the students felt really brought a sense of hopelessness over the student body. The student walkout was a result of our pent up feelings.

On the day of the walkout, I remember asking the students who weren't planning to participate in the event why. Why did they choose to stay? The responses generally fell under not wanting to miss a test or being wary of a teacher's disapproval. I understand why they made such a decision. After all, it is also the same reason why I am writing this letter anonymously. But why do we need to use acts of civil disobedience just to get our voices out there? We shouldn't need to put our education and futures on the line just to be heard. We are more than our attendance records and acceptance letters, damn it, but when are we going to act like it?

★★★★★

CHALLENGE in the classroom

After a difficult and chaotic return to in-person school last week, I was excited to share the last CHALLENGE editorial, "Criminal Rulers Mandate Profit Over Workers Health." In one of the classes I teach, my students responded well to the article and it led to a series of good class discussions over three days.

We started off by talking about the ways in which racism and inequality (frequent topics in our class) were making the current Omicron variant worse. Students were quick to recall the ways in which Covid-19 has disproportionately hit Black and Latin workers harder.

Next we dove into the article. The dis-

cussion questions provided on PLP.org (Progressive Labor Party) provided a helpful guide to our conversations over the next few days. Since ours is a bilingual class, we read the Spanish version with the English provided for reference as needed. On day one, we got through the first section and discussed "Why is the focus on the pandemic's impact on the international working class [in all countries] important?"

The next day, we used the memes and social media posts about the CDC (from page 5 of the same issue) to reopen our discussion. The idea that the CDC was simply paid by the bosses to push workers back to work after five days was no surprise but still upsetting to students. And the fact that students are still being told to stay home 10 days after a positive test made it clear this action was about preserving profits not protecting lives.

Finally, we ended by discussing a student walkout against unsafe Covid-19 conditions that had affected many schools (but not ours). Some students had heard about the walkout on TV and expressed that they would like to have participated. This connected to us talking about the sway of ideas about personal freedom or wants instead of collective needs. When asked why they or others act this way, students responded with constructive criticisms/self-criticisms such as: "We are conditioned to be that way," "I was taught not to care only about myself, but it is a struggle," and "Selfishness is like a disease."

Thanks CHALLENGE for helping to provide such useful teaching resources to foster a more revolutionary and collective classroom. Next steps: invite certain students to a study group outside of school and read excerpts of "Smash Racism: A Fighter's Manual" with the whole class.

★★★★★

MTA bosses guilty for subway death

A young Latin worker recently lost his life in an accident, while attempting to "jump" the turnstiles in a subway station in Queens. The bosses' media has shared gruesome surveillance video of the incident, which has also gone viral. While he was apparently intoxicated at the time, several comments online are suggesting he deserved it for "fare-beating."

Ohio politician (and fascism apologist) Jim Trakas, for example, disgustingly wrote in response to a New York Post Tweet about the story, "The Darwin Awards claims its first victor of 2022. He died doing what he loved-stealing from others."

These comments (and plenty more that need not be repeated here) show how the bosses work overtime to convince workers that other workers are the real thieves, and that they are responsible for the subway being in such horrible shape.

It goes along with the refrain that "If they can afford to have [insert fancy item here], they can afford the \$2.75 to ride the train."

The reality is that the racist MTA (Metropolitan Transportation Authority) bosses are \$35 billion in debt to their Wall Street overlords (AMNY, 10/13/20). That's why they need to keep cutting service to many working-class neighborhoods. Less money to hire workers and more money for the Wall Street finance capitalists. So even if every single person paid the fare, it wouldn't put a dent in improving anything.

But of course, the ruling class needs to create boogymen to blame for its shortfalls (see page 2). What better way for them to do that than by pitting workers against one

another?

Also, many workers have a hard time paying the fare and balancing other critical financial responsibilities in their lives. While the city has a fare program in place to supposedly help these people, former Mayor Bill DeBlasio cut \$65 million from the program in 2020, using reduced pandemic ridership as an excuse. (StreetsBlog-NYC, 6/30/20)

These cuts left so-called "essential" workers, who couldn't work from home, struggling to pay their way to their jobs. Many of them are Black and Latin, as racism once again rears its ugly head.

The subway, just like hospitals and fire departments, provides an essential service for millions of workers in the city, whose taxes already pay for the trains and buses. It's not workers fault that money goes towards imperialist war, leaving our infrastructure to rot.

No worker deserves to die just because they did not pay a fare to use the trains! Public transit should be completely free. Under a communist world, that would be a reality. One that can't come soon enough.

★★★★★

Red on radio exposes democracy

I gave the following statement on the Rick Smith labor talk show on WBAI radio airing Saturdays at 6pm.

"Hi Rick, I'd like to give an historical perspective to the January 6 Capitol insurrection. All Democrats and Republicans say they want to save democracy, a system that originated in the Greek Empire that featured a ratio of 40 slaves for every free man. Following the example of Greek democracy, the Constitution gave voting power only to slave and property owners and capitalists while restricting workers, slaves, women, indigenous people and immigrants from voting. U.S. history includes hundreds of racist insurrections to crush the Black working class and prevent racial unity. Whole communities were burned to the ground.

The Democrats represent the U.S. Empire of finance capitalists and imperialists who profit from endless wars that consume the majority of our taxes. The Republicans represent America First domestic capitalists who don't want to support the U.S. Empire's tax costs. They have allied with the racist insurrectionists who were made up of over 50 percent business owners and 10 percent military dedicated to take back their country and restore white supremacy.

The 20 million protestors of all races who marched against police murders and for equality last year have no stake in the capitalist's fight for power. The growing wave of national and international strikes and rebellions are the worldwide voices of a rising working class, capable of forming a worker's party to end capitalist racist inequality and endless wars. All history is of class struggle and workers today must decide which side they're on."

The whole statement was allowed on the air and the host referred to it several times during the remainder of the program. The reason is there is an audience for many of these ideas.

★★★★★

CORRECTION

The first paragraph of the previous editorial (1/19) mentions how Brazil's president Jair Bolsonaro downplayed the Covid-19 crisis. The misleader in question was actually Argentina's president Alberto Fernández.

GLOSSARY COMMUNIST TERMS

Fascism

Capitalism's response to a crisis of their system, when the bosses can no longer sustain the charade of liberal democracy and resort to more direct control and state terror instead. Fascism is marked by the ruling capitalists disciplining their own ranks to serve the urgent needs of the capitalist state and weather the crisis. To defend their system from internal and external threats, they use all the means available in their state apparatus, including violence. To build unity within their class and loyalty from workers, they rely on nationalist politics and calls for sacrifice. Their strategy is to mislead the working class to kill our working class sisters and brothers in the next inter-imperialist war.

Big Fascists

The Big Fascists are the dominant finance capitalist faction of the U.S. ruling class. They represent the wealthiest and most powerful bosses in the U.S., including multinational banks like Chase and Citibank, multinational oil companies like ExxonMobil, the big automakers, Boeing, Amazon, and the major media companies. As the dominant grouping since World War II, the Big Fascists were the architects of the liberal world order with the U.S. bosses on top. Their dominance rests on U.S. financial and military power and its strategic control of the Middle East and the flow of oil to Europe, Asia, and Africa. To sustain this dominance, they need to rebuild a huge, multiracial military for inter-imperialist war, most likely with China.

Small Fascists

The Small Fascists are a group of domestically oriented U.S. capitalists who are challenging the Big Fascists over the direction of U.S. imperialism. Since their interests are less tied to controlling the flow of oil, they are against heavy taxation to keep troops in the Middle East and in general oppose costly military bases and invasions. They're willing to rely on a smaller, whiter army, backed by nuclear weapons and the Air Force. They use open racism to build a political following.

Wally Meets Red China

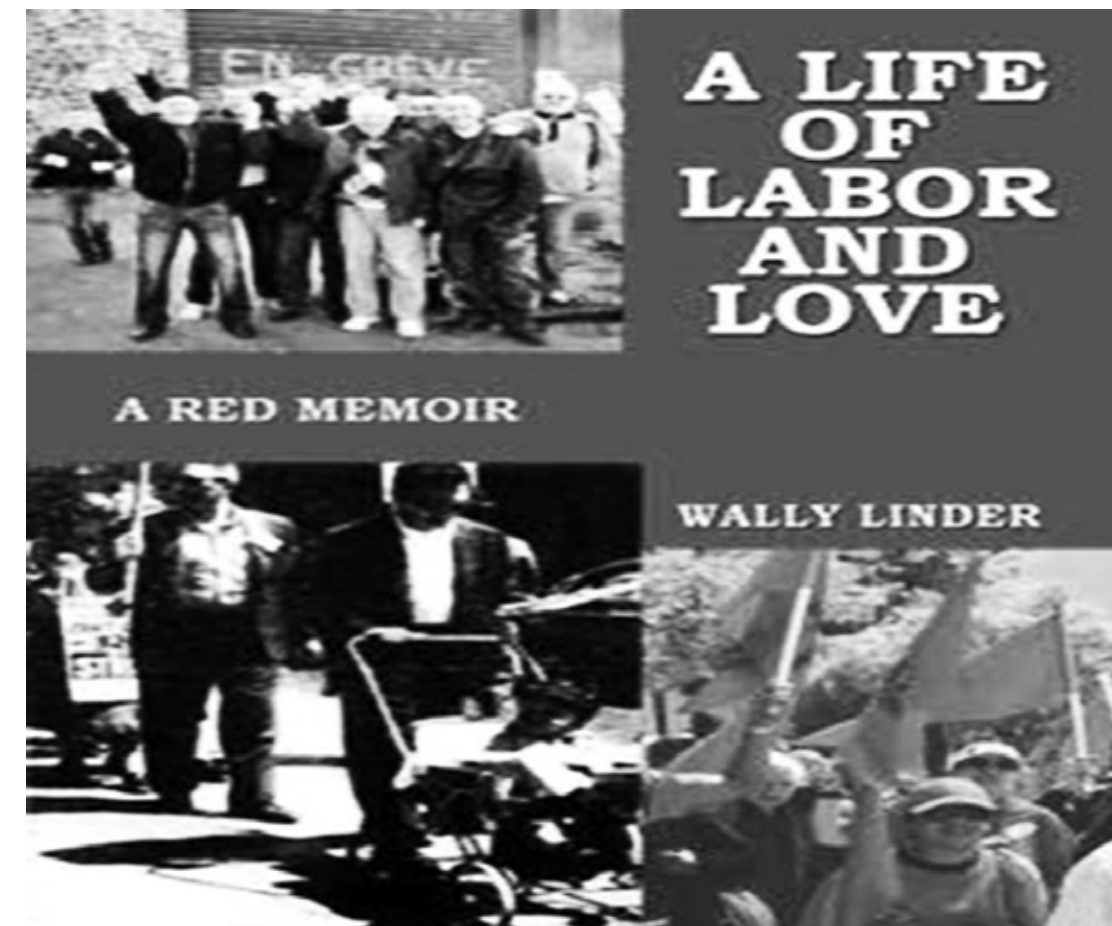
Continued from page 8

This was years before Richard Nixon established relations with the Chinese—or before PLP concluded that China was going the way of the Soviet Union and becoming what is now the world's second biggest capitalist economy. My trip had to be secret, even from my own family. How to tell my wife Esther that I would be gone for a week doing Party work? I told her I had to meet with our comrades in San Francisco. I flew to Paris and took a cab to the train station to travel to Geneva. After renting a hotel room near the Chinese ambassador's residence, I walked there to meet their officials. I was greeted by the ambassador and sat down to a delicious seven-course meal of Chinese dishes, ones I had never encountered in Brooklyn.

Afterwards, the ambassador asked me about my experiences as a communist in the U.S. I told him about my 11 years on the railroad and answered questions about the Party's ongoing activities. I told him we wanted to have closer relations with the Chinese Party; the ambassador said he would report our discussions to Peking and get back to me soon. He then suggested I rent a car and become a "tourist" for a week before returning to get the answer from Peking.

This was my first trip anywhere beyond the U.S. and Canada. I decided to drive over the Alps to Italy. I arrived in Milan and took in the sights, especially the outdoor debates in the central square, and ate some delicious Italian food. I then returned to Geneva to receive the reply from Peking, which I would take back to New York.

By the time I got back to Brooklyn, two weeks had elapsed—a week longer than I'd told Esther I'd be gone. By the eighth day of my trip, she'd been getting concerned about what was happening "in San Francisco," so she asked our chairperson Milt how to get in touch with me. Somehow he convinced her he



couldn't phone me because I had gone down to Mexico to exchange experiences with the famous communist painter, David Siqueiros, who had strong ties with Mexico's railroad workers.

When I finally arrived back in Brooklyn, I apologized to Esther and stuck with the Mexico story. Later that spring, however, she was gathering clothes for the cleaners when lo and behold, she plucked my passport from an inside jacket pocket—and found entries for Paris and Geneva. She confronted me and said, "What's all this?" Now that it was all over, I felt obliged to explain the whole business. At first she was suspicious, but then she relented. Her last words on the subject were: "Why couldn't you take me with you?" ☺

CHALLENGE strives to be the communist paper for and by the international working class. We call on all readers, supporters, and comrades to submit class struggle articles, analytical pieces, original photos and graphics, letters, and political cartoons.

The next deadline is the **Friday evening of January 28**. Send to desafio.challenge@gmail.com. For some guidance and house style rules, please go to www.bit.ly/338ZJow

All submissions are open to collective discussion, struggle, and change. See box on page 2 about fighting for collectivity and against a cult of the individual.



RED EYE ON THE NEWS . . .

New Green Deal is a capitalist competition for control of the world

Foreign Affairs, January/February)—World War I transformed oil into a strategic commodity. In 1918, the British statesman Lord Curzon famously said that the Allied cause had "floated to victory upon a wave of oil." From that point forward, energy became a source of national power and its absence a strategic vulnerability. In the century that followed, countries blessed with oil and gas resources developed their societies and wielded outsize power in the international system

...A move away from oil and gas will reconfigure the world just as dramatically. But discussions about the shape of a clean energy future too often skip over some important details...even when the world achieves net-zero emissions, it will hardly mean the end of fossil fuels...being a clean energy superpower will actually yield geopolitical influence ... innovation and cheap capital will determine who wins the clean energy revolution...control of the supply chain for minerals such as cobalt, copper, lithium, nickel, and rare earths

...Washington and its partners in Europe could ultimately use their collective economic and diplomatic power to spur decarbonization around the world; they might form a "climate club" of countries committed to net-zero emissions that would impose tariffs on imports from outside the club

The Bosses need more workers to exploit

The Economist 1/14 —Britain's population statistics paint a stark picture. The fertility rate, which can be thought of as the number of children a woman will have during her lifetime, stands at just 1.65. Life-expectancy projections are increasingly pessimistic, too. However reluctant they may be to do so, countries with aging populations will have to look beyond their borders. The slowdown in life-expectancy increase is also weighing on Britain's population growth. Projections made since 2012 have steadily revised down period life expectancy at birth (a measure of the average number of years people will live beyond their current age). For someone born in 2025, the latest projected life expectancy is 2.1 years lower than the projection made in 2012. Migration has been a key source of population growth in Britain for decades but ... will play an even more important role in the future.

U.S. and Russia prepare for war in Europe

New York Times, 1/14— For years, U.S. officials have tiptoed around the question of how much military support to provide to Ukraine, for fear of provoking Russia. Now, in what would be a major turnaround, senior Biden administration officials are warning that the United States could throw its weight behind a Ukrainian insurgency should... Russia invade Ukraine. In Afghanistan, the United States showed itself to be dismal at fighting insurgencies. But when it comes to funding them, mili-

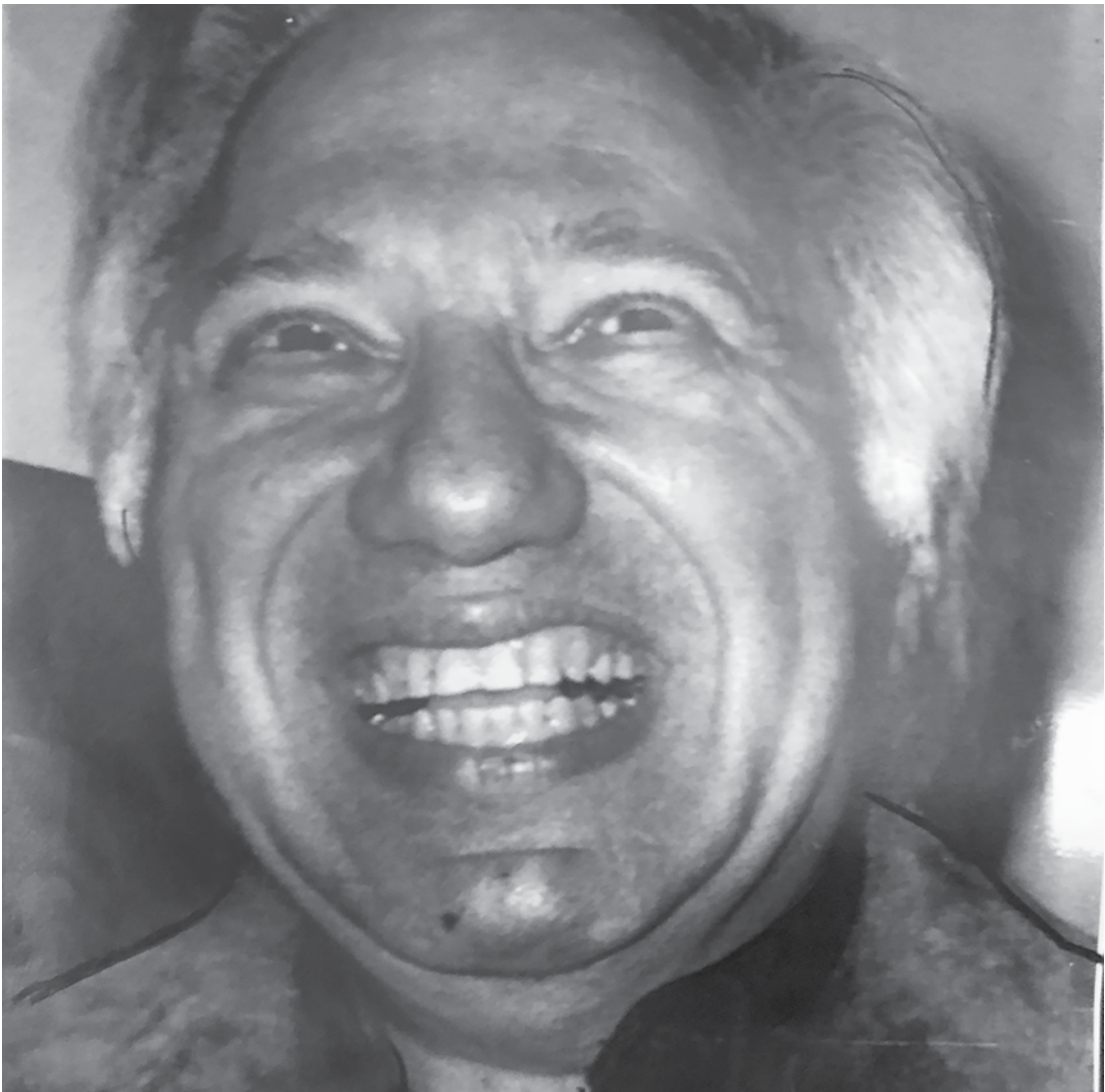
tary experts say it is a different ballgame...Biden administration officials have begun signaling to Russia, which has massed about 100,000 troops at its borders with Ukraine, that even if it managed to swiftly capture territory, Mr. Putin would eventually find the costs of an invasion prohibitively expensive in terms of military losses. "If Putin invades Ukraine with a major military force, U.S. and NATO military assistance — intelligence, cyber, anti-armor and anti-air weapons, offensive naval missiles — would ratchet up significantly," said James Stavridis, a retired four-star Navy admiral who was the supreme allied commander at NATO. "And if it turned into a Ukrainian insurgency, Putin should realize that after fighting insurgencies ourselves for two decades, we know how to arm, train and energize them."

China imperialists organize against U.S. imperialists

Al Jazeera 1/15 —A 25-year comprehensive co-operation agreement signed between Iran and China last year has now entered the implementation stage, according to Iran's foreign minister. Signed in Tehran in March 2021 when former President Hassan Rouhani was in office, the "strategic accords" entails economic, military and security cooperation. Among other things, China has been purchasing Iranian oil — with a discount — in defiance of the [U.S. imposed] sanctions over the past three years.

IN MEMORIAM

WALTER LINDER SERVED
INTL WORKING CLASS FOR A LIFETIME



Wally, as he was known by all, was the last surviving founder of the revolutionary communist Progressive Labor Party (PLP). He died January 3, 2022, at the age of 91, his family and comrades at his side, after a lifetime of principled struggle on behalf of the international working class.

Although Wally missed being a “May Day baby” by a few hours, the international workers’ holiday would be a big part of his life. Wally attended his first May Day demonstration with his mother in 1942, at the height of the war against fascism. Later he would help to organize decades of May Day marches for PLP, a day that represented our Party’s commitment to raise the red flag high and advance the historical communist movement.

Wally dedicated his life to the interests of the working class. For many years he was a member of the Communist Party (CP) USA. In 1951, as a student at the City College of New York, he helped lead a walkout over racist admissions policies that excluded Black, Latin, and Jewish students.

Later he helped to lead the CP’s industrial union work in the Brotherhood of Railway Clerks, including an epic strike that shut down the entire New York-New Jersey waterfront. Wally also began his long and prolific writing career on the sports pages of the Daily Worker, where he covered the New York Yankees and honed a lifelong devotion to baseball.

In 1962, recognizing that the Soviet Union and the CPUSA had abandoned communism in favor of state capitalism, Wally joined a group of comrades to establish something new: the Progressive Labor Movement, which

led the first demonstration against the U.S. war in Vietnam. In 1965, Wally helped to organize the revolutionary communist Progressive Labor Party.

For many decades, Wally led PLP’s trade union section, where he recruited, developed, and inspired generations of organizers. He was proud of his leadership role in a number of PLP-affiliated organizations, including the International Committee Against Racism (INCAR), which fought the resurgence of the KKK and Nazis in the 1970s; the Workers Action Movement (WAM), which led a new era of militant class struggle in the 1970s and 1980s; and the Solidarity Organizing Committee (SOC), which spearheaded militant and politically advanced labor actions

in the U.S. and internationally in the 1990s. Throughout, Wally served as an editor and contributor to CHALLENGE, and to Progressive Labor Party magazine and later The Communist magazine. His work on behalf of the Party led him to worldwide travels and correspondence in the monumental effort to build a mass international communist party. Wally’s enormous legacy consists of the hun-



Wally Meets
Red China

The following is adapted from Wally Linder’s memoir, A Life of Labor and Love:

In the early 1970s, Progressive Labor Party saw the Chinese Communists as the main revolutionary hope for the future. The Party shipped them nearly a thousand issues of every issue of CHALLENGE. The official Chinese news agency would begin every article on events in the U.S. with, “U.S. Challenge says....”

To have more direct contact, it was proposed that I travel to Geneva to talk with China’s ambassador.

Continued from page 7

dreds of communist organizers he trained and influenced, many of whom would go on to devote their lives to the class struggle. Wally also had an indirect impact on thousands more who were inspired by the people he trained, and by the hundreds of thousands whose lives were changed by these collective efforts.

Wally was preceded in death by his first wife, and comrade Esther Chanzis. He is survived by his son Andrew Linder, his daughter Anita Caref (Doyle O’Connor), and his grandchildren Kevin Caref (Crystal Clark); Peter Caref; Elisa Caref (Pascal Abidor); and step-grandson Gavan O’Connor. Wally was also preceded in death by his second wife Toni Ades and is survived by his stepdaughter Andrea Ades Vasquez (Gerald Markowitz) and their daughter Isa Vasquez. Wally was additionally preceded in death by his long-time companion Vera Dumont.

Wally Linder will be remembered as a loyal and dedicated comrade for as long as there is a revolutionary workers’ struggle to change the world.✚

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